

PEARL DIVERS

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From the proceeds of the season's catch one-fifth is 427 ● turned over to the owner of the boat as rent for its use, 465 and from the remainder the season's expenses for food, 228 water and the like are deducted. The money that is left 466 represents the profits of the season. Each diver receives an equal share of this; each assistant two-thirds of a share. The captain, who has done no diving but has superintended the season's campaign, receives a diver's share, as does the sheikh of the town in some instances, this being the government tax upon the industry.

This seems a good system. In theory it could hardly be improved, but in practice it could hardly be worse. The divers cannot read or write, so they have no way [212] of knowing whether or not their accounts are correctly kept. They may not assist in, or even witness, the process of sale, so they have not the slightest control over the captain, nor any means of protecting themselves from dishonesty on his part. The captain himself is between the upper and nether millstones, for the only way he can rent a diving boat is by promising to sell his pearls to the owner of that boat, and from this owner he may receive not over fifty per cent of their market price. Even this reduced price the divers do not receive undiminished, for the captain enriches himself privately at their expense before the sale is reported. Then as if matters were not bad enough, almost without exception the men are in their captain's debt, and remain so throughout their lives.

The fact that nearly all the divers are in debt is partly 426 their own fault. When a man begins to dive, he could [465] avoid borrowing money if he were at all determined to do so. The diving season lasts only five months at the out- 466 side, and the season's proceeds may be sufficient to live on for the whole year with economy and care. If they